

Baker, Russell
Roselli, John
Giancana, Sam
ORG 1 Mafia

Only a Ho-Hum Murder

By Russell Baker

The gangsters Sam Giancana and John Roselli who were associated with the C.I.A. in a scheme to dispatch Fidel Castro have now both been murdered after discussing their C.I.A. enterprise with the United States Senate, and the police have pronounced the incidents "gangland-style killings."

The phrase "gangland-style killing" has the cozy resonance of "home-style cooking," perhaps because both suggest the intimacy of hearth and fire with nobody but us family gathered round and nobody else welcome, Jack. These family affairs are, of course, meddled into by the constabulary, but rarely with much enthusiasm.

This may be because police success at nabbing perpetrators of "gangland-style killings" has never been such as to get them into the world series of detection, with the result that incessant failure may have dulled their appetite for the hunt.

Or, it may be because policemen believe the subjects of "gangland-style killings" aren't worth working overtime for. I don't know, and I certainly don't mean to impute either languor, timidity or indifference to America's homicide squads. I simply point out that once a murder has been called "gangland-style," apprehension of the perpetrator almost invariably fails to occur.

This raises the question whether "gangland-style" murders might possibly be catching among people who don't come from gangland. Consider the Roselli case. The body is found in the customary barrel, with the customary weights, in the customary water. It bears the customary bullet holes. Roselli's publicized standing in gangland seems to leave an open-and-shut case, which the police will quietly shut as soon as possible.

If you and I know this, reader, does it not follow that it is also known by, let us say, some hot-tempered waiter whom Roselli has been consistently undertipping for years?

If that waiter wanted to take his revenge and get away with it, is it not logical that he would do it "gangland-style," so the police could forget it, rather than by scalding Roselli to death in public with a tureen of lobster bisque?

This is not to suggest that the police ought to be giving Roselli's waiters the third degree, but merely to point out that gangland can have no monopoly on gangland-style killing. Any body with a barrel, some concrete and a capacious expanse of water can

corner greasy spoon can engage in "home-style cooking."

The one special requirement is a victim who is a bona fide citizen of gangland. Obviously, a philandering husband cannot do in a loyal wife of 40 years "gangland-style" and expect the police not to lift an eyebrow. Unless the subject is the real gangland thing, it won't work.

The corollary of this fact is that gangland people are peculiarly vulnerable to "gangland-style" murder by devious non-ganglanders, who have no right to get away with it.

This must be infuriating to them. Imagine that you are an eminent statesman of gangland, and the vexation, becomes manifest. You are entirely prepared to be sent off "gangland-style" by your colleagues. Those are the rules of the land.

Moreover, if they complete the job, you wouldn't dream of telling the police who did it, even if you could. That would violate the rules of the sportsmanship governing gangland. In gangland, good sports don't tell.

But to have some alien from the outer world—some straight-Jake cousin who wants his share of your will

OBSERVER

prematurely, some barber who hates your sideburns—to have somebody like this do the job on you and get away with it because it's done "gangland-style"—Ah, my friend, that must seem a cruel injustice.

Such a bad egg as that you would surely betray to the cops. How infuriating it would be if they looked at the barrel, the concrete, the water, the bullet holes and closed the case with a quietly murmured, "Just another gangland-style killing."

You will have been the victim, not only of murder, but also of discrimination, for it is only your membership in gangland that prevents the police from extending themselves to bring your persecutor to justice.

I do not know how policemen feel about nonmembers of gangland killing gangland members "gangland-style," but my hunch is that they take a sterner view of it than they do of gangland men bumping off each other. The average cop probably thinks it is not the kind of thing decent people ought to be doing.

I know very well that gangland folks don't approve of it, and to make sure that there is no misunderstanding, I want to assure them that I haven't the heart to swat a fly, myself, and, what's more, I've never been any good